



Civil Rights Commission
2009 Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Essay Contest

"The Dream Marches On: The Other Martin"

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THE OTHER MARTIN

In the early morning of April 4th a bullet tore through the Memphis sky. A shot had been fired that changed the entire face of the Civil Rights movement. Martin Luther King had been assassinated. It was early in the year of 1968 and never before had the blacks of America needed Martin Luther King as badly as they did now. Yet no longer was he there to lead the battle for equality.

As the years passed historians were quick to idolize M.L.K. The textbooks of our nation's schools were filled with tales of Martin Luther's struggle for equal rights, and his birthday has become a national holiday. Yet somewhere in all this glamour, part of Martin's message was lost, and parts of history were skipped over.

Martin Luther King's childhood, philosophies, and many of his actions are not known to most people. Textbooks often forget to share the facts about M.L.K.'s views on capitalism, and the work he did outside of the civil rights movement. Our society views M.L.K. with such high regard, yet most people barely know anything about him.

Martin Luther King Jr. was born right before the great depression. He was lucky enough to grow up in a solid middle-class household, but he still witnessed the tragedy that surrounded him. As a young child Martin saw the poor standing in long lines outside of soup kitchens. This may have affected his anti-capitalistic views as he grew older.

As the years passed Martin was recognized as being exceptionally bright, and skipped two grades, entering college at the age of 15. He showed an unquenchable thirst for knowledge, as he read the works of great historical thinkers such as Marx, Thoreau, and Gandhi.

He was greatly influenced by their teachings. Thoreau's writings on civil disobedience shaped the way Martin approached social activism. After reading Marx, M.L.K. rejected the idea of communism,

but was also persuaded to disagree with the capitalist system. Yet out of all of these philosophers, Gandhi influenced him the most, to the degree that Martin Luther King took a trip to India.

This trip refreshed M.L.K.'s view of the world. His ideas had been strengthened in many areas, yet in other areas of his mind, seeds of doubt had been planted. After having traveled and seen such a wider perspective of the world, Martin found it hard to believe in the Evangelical Christian beliefs he had been raised with. Could religion co-exist with logical thinking? He battled with that question all through his life.

Yet this didn't stop M.L.K. from diving head first into the civil rights movement. Through the Montgomery Bus Boycott and his campaigns in Albany and Birmingham, M.L.K. rose up in the ranks of the movement becoming a prominent figure in the battle for civil rights.

Throughout this era in the Martin's life, he was fighting an uphill battle against the authorities, yet this helped him amplify his message of non-violence. Even after his house had been bombed, his life had been threatened, and he had witnessed the horrors of racial hate, Martin was still a stubborn pacifist. His followers saw how even after suffering so much in the hands of the enemy, he still pressed for a peaceful approach.

Not only did Martin Luther King have to deal with harsh southern states and their police, he also had to deal with the intrusive federal government. M.L.K.'s phone lines were tapped by the government for five years, due to suspicions that he was associated with the communist movement.

This was all in vain, for the Martin was not a communist, yet he wasn't a capitalist either. Many do not know that Martin Luther King was a socialist. In one of his later speeches he stated: "There must be a better distribution of wealth, and maybe America must move toward democratic socialism."

As M.L.K. grew older, he started to shift away from the civil rights movement. From 1966 to his death, he spent the majority of his time fighting for workers rights. He said America was on the wrong

side of the world revolution, and that as a country we should be supporting the "shirtless and barefoot people of the third world."

Also as the war escalated, Martin Luther King spoke out strongly against it. He in no way tried to sugarcoat his anti-war viewpoints, stating that the U.S. government was "the greatest purveyor of violence in the world today". His views on the Vietnam War were received sourly by the American people.

Then on April 4th, 1968 Martin Luther King was killed. He was in Memphis Tennessee to support a union strike, when his life was cut short. The country mourned the loss of the great leader, and the same media organizations that used to slur his image were quick to portray him in a favorable light.

Many years have passed since 1968, and America has improved greatly when it comes to equal rights for all races. Many say that M.L.K. would be quite happy if he saw the state of our nation today. I disagree. Martin Luther King would be ashamed. Ashamed to see us fighting pointless wars in the middle east, ashamed to see the poor denied healthcare, and unions being undermined.

It is our job, as a country, to continue the fight that Martin Luther King gave up his life for. He had a dream, and it's our job to make that dream a reality.

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